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Communist Party, U.S.A.:

Revolution turned middle-aged

By Peter C. Stuart

Staff correspondent of
The Christian Science Monitor

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"The revolution of the American working classes" is run from a slit of a building wedged between grimy wholesale houses on West 26th Street off Madison Square.

Inside the maroon-enameled door, identified only by the building number (23), is a tiny foyer lined with a rack of dusty, yellowing pamphlets and books by V. I. Lenin, Helen Gurley Flynn, Claude Lightfoot, and Gus Hall.

A scratchy plastic window discloses an adjoining office, cluttered with worn furniture and manned by two women. The women appear to be about as old as the "revolution" itself, or middle-aged. So are most of the officials sprinkled elsewhere on the building's three floors.

This is the headquarters of the Communist Party of the United States of America.

Ranks dwindle

The setting—more docile than revolutionary—may be revealing. For the current upsurge of civil unrest, the most severe since the great depression, seems generally to have left the Communist Party, U.S.A., behind.

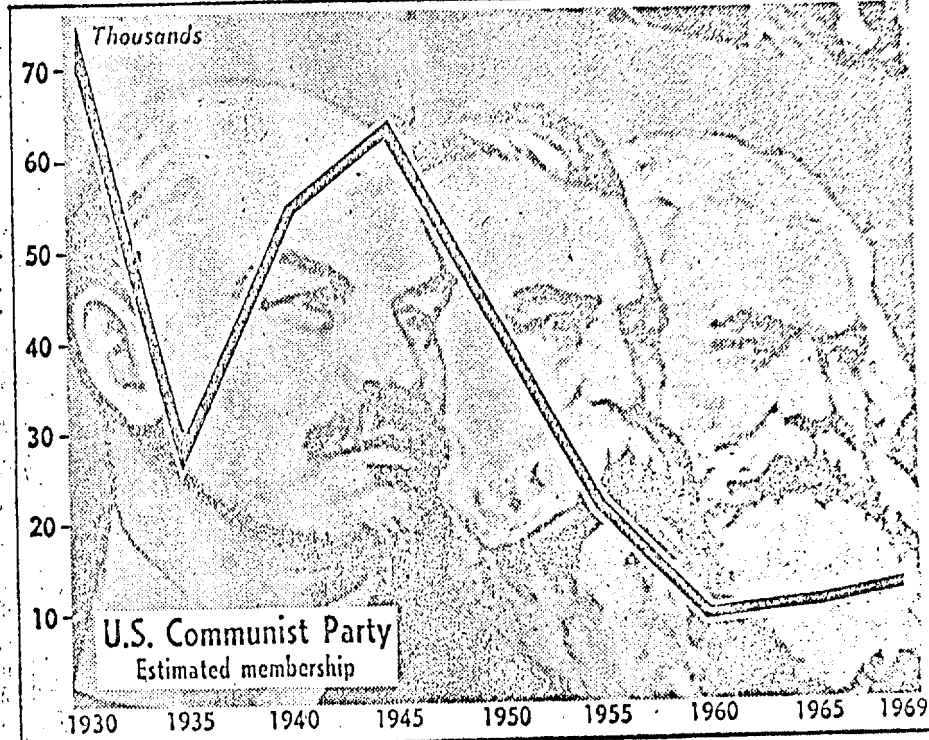
In the 1930's and 1940's the party attracted more than 100,000 members. Today it claims something over 13,000. And even this figure, say knowledgeable persons who recently left the party, is probably inflated.

The party's ranks never really have recovered from the exodus of 1956-58. At that time, revelations on the evils of Stalinism produced a liberalization movement within the party much like Czechoslovakia's last year. It was equally unsuccessful. In its wake the party lost well over half its members, the rolls dwindling from 20,000 down to as few as 5,000.

The party has tried hard to penetrate the student protest and black militancy movements. It has befriended the Students for a Democratic Society since the SDS lifted its constitutional membership ban on Communists in 1965. And the party professes an alliance with the Black Panthers.

"We're growing among youth," declared James E. Jackson, secretary on international affairs for the party's national committee, during an interview in his small office upon his return from the world Communist meeting in Moscow. He said "many" young people serve on the national committee.

Observers outside the party contend,



By a staff artist and Associated Press

Lenin, Engels, and Marx

however, that the efforts to reach rebellious youth and black militants have made little more than a dent.

"Many of these people call themselves Communists and Marxist-Leninists, so you would expect them to flock to the party. But they do not," said John Gates, a former editor of the Daily Worker, the party newspaper, and a leader of the 1956-58 defectors.

The number of young members recruited may barely offset the number of older members lost by natural attrition, he said. Many young party members (such as Bettina Aptheker Kurzweil, a member of the national committee) are merely children of older members, he added.

Another indicator of party health is the circulation of its newspaper. Circulation once soared as high as 100,000. But when Mr. Gates left the party in 1958, the Daily Worker was published only weekly, then semiweekly, as The Worker. One year ago it became the Daily World, issued five days a week. Circulation now is said to be 27,000, of which probably a sizable portion is distributed free.

The influence of Communist Party, U.S.A., may have declined even more than the drop in membership would suggest. In its heyday, the Party was closely associated with many labor unions, black organizations, and nationality groups. "We used to be able to